



# UPDATE

November/December 2014

*A bi-monthly newsletter for Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, and for those who serve Veterans. Send news items and comments to St. Cloud VA Health Care System, Attn: Public Affairs Officer, 4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud, MN 56303, or via email to [Barry.Venable@va.gov](mailto:Barry.Venable@va.gov)*



St. Cloud VA Dental Clinic, circa 1945

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HONORING SERVICE  
EMPOWERING  
HEALTH

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## Calendar of Events

Saturday, November 1, 8, 15, & 22 (8 a.m.-Noon), or Tuesday, November 4 or 18 (4:30-6:00 p.m.)—**Flu Shot Clinic** in Building 1 at the St. Cloud VA campus for Veterans receiving health care through the St. Cloud VA Health Care System. Any changes to the flu vaccination clinic schedule will be announced on the flu shot information line: (320) 255-6444.

Monday, November 3 & December 1 (8:10 a.m.)—Listen to the **Veterans Affairs Radio Show** on KNSI, AM 1450/FM 103.3.

Tuesday, November 4 & 18, December 2 & 16 (12-2 p.m.)—**St. Cloud Area Veterans' Law Clinic**. Free legal consultation for Veterans for: Social Security Law, Housing, Consumer, Child Support, Family Law, and Employment. No criminal law issues will be discussed. Please call 320-253-0138 or 1-800-622-7773 to schedule an appointment. Appointments are held at the St. Cloud VA in Building 28, Room 126.

Tuesday, November 4 (1:00-3:30 p.m.)—**Flu Shot Clinic** at the Brainerd CBOC for Veterans receiving health care through the St. Cloud VA Health Care System. Any changes to the flu vaccination clinic schedule will be announced on the flu shot information line: (320) 255-6444.

Wednesday, November 5, November 12, November 19, and November 26 (7-7:05 a.m. or 11-11:05 a.m. or 7-7:05 p.m.)—**VA Caregiver Support Line-Caregiver Relaxation Calls**. Weekly 5-10 minute relaxation exercises for Caregivers of Veterans available directly from your home or mobile phone! To join a call: 1-800-767-1750; when prompted, enter access code: 73687. No registration is required. Participation is limited to the first 100 Caregivers who access the call.

Sunday, November 9 (1-3 p.m.)—**Veterans Parade and Social**. St. Cloud Metropolitan Veterans Council, Times Media, City of St. Cloud and the St. Cloud VA host this eighth annual event to honor the men and women who have served our country in the armed forces. Parade begins on the west side of the St. Cloud VA Medical Center, proceeds east across 44th Avenue and concludes on the north side of Apollo High School where a "Thank You" Open House and light snacks in the Apollo Commons will be available.

Tuesday, November 11—**Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday**. St. Cloud VA Health Care System outpatient clinics and administrative offices, including Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed in observance of Veterans Day, a federal holiday. The Urgent Care Clinic at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center will be open. Hours of operation for the Urgent Care Clinic are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week, including federal holidays. The Community Living Center and residential treatment programs will be open.

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## Calendar of Events

Tuesday, November 11 (1:30 p.m.)—**Veterans Day Ceremony** in the Auditorium (Building 8) on the St. Cloud VA campus. The St. Cloud Metropolitan Veterans Council is sponsoring a Veterans Day program. Jeremy Wolfsteller, a U.S. Army Veteran and Assistant Service Officer for the American Legion, Department of Minnesota, will provide the keynote address. Parking is available to the north and east of Building 8. Veterans, their families and members of the public are invited.

Wednesday, November 12 (6-7 p.m.) or November 19 (2-3 p.m.)—**VA Caregiver Support Line**. Free education and support for Caregivers—right from your home phone! Topic for November is *The Three C's of Caring for Someone with Dementia: A Book Bag of Self-Care Tips*. To register, call Jess Behrends, St. Cloud VA, 320-252-1670, ext. 7283.

Tuesday, November 18 (9-11 a.m.)—**Understanding PTSD for Caregivers** on the St. Cloud VA campus (exact location provided upon registration). Caregivers of Veterans are invited to attend a video training designed to increase Caregiver knowledge and understanding of PTSD and coach Caregivers on how to provide support to Veterans with PTSD. Registration required. Contact Jess Behrends at 320-252-1670, ext. 7283, or [jessica.behrends@va.gov](mailto:jessica.behrends@va.gov).

Wednesday, November 19 & December 17 (8:10 a.m.)—Listen to the **Voices for Veterans Radio Show** on WJON AM 1240.

Friday, November 21 & December 19 (12-2 p.m.)—**Southwestern Minnesota Veterans' Law Clinic** at the Montevideo CBOC. FREE legal consultation for Veterans. No criminal law issues will be discussed. Please call 320-403-1051 to schedule an appointment.

Thursday, November 27—**Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday**. St. Cloud VA Health Care System outpatient clinics and administrative offices, including Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed in observance of Thanksgiving, a federal holiday. The Urgent Care Clinic at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center will be open. Hours of operation for the Urgent Care Clinic are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week, including federal holidays. The Community Living Center and residential treatment programs will be open.

Tuesday, December 2 (9-10 a.m.), or Wednesday, December 10 (6-7 p.m.) or December 17 (2-3 p.m.)—**VA Caregiver Support Line**. Free education and support for Caregivers—right from your home phone! Topic for December is *Finding Comfort in the Healing Gifts of the Season*. To register, call Jess Behrends, St. Cloud VA, 320-252-1670, ext. 7283.

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## Calendar of Events

Tuesday, December 2 (7-8 p.m.)—**VA Benefits Workshop with Great River Federal Credit Union**, Apollo High School, Door 30, Room 415, 1000 44th Ave. North, St. Cloud. Come learn about VA services and Veteran benefits whether you are enrolled or not at the VA. If you are not enrolled, please bring form DD214. Reservations must be made by November 28 by calling Karla T. or Shannon B. with Great River Federal Credit Union at 320-252-5393.

Thursday, December 4 (4:30-7:00 p.m.)—**Brainerd Lakes Business Holiday Extravaganza**, Madden's Town Hall, 11266 Pine Beach Peninsula, Brainerd, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be on site to answer questions about health care services and eligibility.

Wednesday, December 10 —**St. Cloud VAHCS Town Hall Meeting** (5-6 p.m.)—American Legion Post #270, 304 10th Ave. South, **Buffalo**, MN. Veterans are invited to hear from and have concerns addressed by St. Cloud VA officials. Eligibility and MyHealtheVet representatives will be available. Flu shots available from 4-5 p.m. for Veterans receiving VA health care (please bring your VA I.D. card).

Saturday, December 20 (9 a.m.-5 p.m.), or Sunday, December 21 (9 a.m.-3 p.m.)—**Brainerd Gun Show** at the National Guard Armory, 1115 Wright Street, Brainerd, MN. Representatives from the St. Cloud VA will be on site to answer questions about health care services and eligibility.

Thursday, December 25—**Outpatient Clinics Closed for Federal Holiday**. St. Cloud VA Health Care System outpatient clinics and administrative offices, including Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Brainerd, Montevideo and Alexandria will be closed in observance of Christmas, a federal holiday. The Urgent Care Clinic at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center will be open. Hours of operation for the Urgent Care Clinic are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week, including federal holidays. The Community Living Center and residential treatment programs will be open.

## 45 Ways to Honor Veterans on Veterans Day

1. Attend a Veteran's Day Event
2. Ask a Veteran about their time in the military, and really listen to the answer
3. Hang a flag in your yard
4. Ask an aging Veteran to share with you the song that most takes them back
5. Visit the gravesite of a Veteran
6. Visit a homebound Veteran in their home, talk with them, and thank them for their service
7. Visit a homeless Veteran under a bridge, and do the same
8. Take a Veteran out to dinner
9. Take dinner in to a Veteran
10. Tell someone (your family, a friend, a neighbor) about an experience you had serving a Veteran at the VA
11. Take flowers to a Veterans memorial
12. Write and send a letter to someone who's currently serving in the military
13. Ask a neighbor about their deployment
14. Call a Veteran family member
15. Thank a Veteran co-worker for their service
16. Take a private moment to be proud of your country
17. Teach someone (a child, a friend, a neighbor) what it means to be a Veteran
18. Share pictures of a Veteran with someone
19. Say a silent prayer for those who are serving
20. Learn about a current or past war/ conflict (this will make you a better helper)
21. Look up your ancestry and learn about someone in your family who was a Veteran
22. Hug your family, and tell them that



- it's thanks to Veterans that you get to
23. Observe a moment of silence with family and friends
  24. Read something a Veteran wrote about their experience
  25. Wear your favorite "Pro-Vet" T-Shirt. (Examples: Free Hugs for Vets; Remember Our Fallen Veterans; Freedom is not FREE...; Thank a VETERAN; I Heart Veterans!)
  26. Buy a Buddy Poppy. Wear it all day, attach it to your purse or bag and keep it there until it falls apart. When people ask what it is, tell them
  27. Read and share the poem "In Flanders Field the poppies grow"
  28. Make sure your children and grandchildren know who the Veterans are within their own family, and share the family stories with them

29. Do a project about Veterans with young children or grandchildren. For example, let them make their own Veteran flag and plant it in a pot of flowers in front of the house
30. Write on your blog about your appreciation for Veterans
31. Help young children or grandchildren make a thank you card, and post them in the window or at a grocery store bulletin board or library or some other public place
32. (Good for any day:) Stand out in front of the VA and greet Veterans as they are being dropped off at the door. Some older folks even need a hand getting out of the car
33. Tell a loved one why you enjoy serving Veterans
34. Buy a homeless Veteran a cup of coffee
35. Donate time or money or supplies to local Veterans Day drives
36. Volunteer to help a Veteran's Service Organization

(there are lots!)

37. Take a moment to reflect on what it means to live in America
38. Gather with friends and family and watch a patriotic movie
39. Go to a Veterans Day parade
40. Write in your journal how thankful you are for the service of Veterans
41. Take a quiet moment and imagine hearing "taps" played in your head. Think about what it means.
42. Thank a Veteran of his/her service while doing errands
43. Shake a Veteran's hand
44. Send an email that tells a Veteran's story to the people on your contact list
45. Pick one or two of the activities listed above, and resolve to do them at least one time every month this year when it's NOT Veteran's Day



## Celebrate Unsung Heroes: Caregivers

During the month of November, VA's Caregiver Support Program will celebrate National Family Caregivers Month to recognize and honor Caregivers of Veterans: our Nation's unsung heroes. Family Caregivers play a critical role in providing the best care possible for our Nation's Veterans and their labors may often go unnoticed. November is a time to highlight these generous, loving individuals and show appreciation for their indispensable efforts.

As the Veteran population ages, and as combat Veterans return from deployments in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the need for family Caregivers continues to grow. These family Caregivers make countless sacrifices to support ill, injured, or disabled Veterans. A 2014 study by the RAND Corporation found that 12% of Caregivers of Veterans who served after 9/11/2001 and 10% of Veterans from all other years report spending more than 40 hours a week providing care.

The mission of the VA Caregiver Support Program is to promote the health and well-being of family Caregivers who care for our nation's Veterans, through education, resources, support, and services. VA offers numerous programs such as in-home care, adult day health care, respite, and Home Based Primary Care. Caregivers are offered various supports including online and telephone support programs, peer mentoring, and/or local Caregiver support groups. Every VA medical center has at least one Caregiver Support Coordinator who can assist Caregivers with accessing these services and supports.

This November, please join VA in celebrating National Family Caregivers Month and honoring our family Caregivers, who offer so much to improve the well-being of our Nation's heroes.

For more information on VA's Caregiver Support Program, go to <http://www.caregiver.va.gov>, call VA's toll-free Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274, or contact your local St. Cloud VA Caregiver Support Coordinator at (320) 252-1670 ext. 7283.

VA Caregiver Support Program  
Caregiver Support Line



National Family Caregivers Month 2014

*"Care Comes Home"*

### VA Caregiver Support Line Weekly Caregiver Relaxation Calls

**What:** Weekly 5-10 minute relaxation exercises for Caregivers of Veterans available directly from your home or mobile phone!

**When:** Every Wednesday throughout November at 7:00 am, 11:00 am and 7:00 pm.

#### To Join a Call:

**1-800-767-1750**

When prompted, enter access code: 73687

No registration required. Participation is limited to the first 100 Caregivers who access the call.



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# YOGA

## for Women Veterans

When: Thursday's

Time: 9:30a-10:30a

Dates: November 6-December 18

Where: St. Cloud VA, Building 29, Room 105

## Renew . Restore . Rejuvenate

*Reduce Stress - Increase Flexibility  
Create Balance in the Mind and Body*

*Women Veterans are invited to sign up for a 6 week progressive gentle yoga class. Participants must have physical ability to transition from floor to standing movement. Space is limited to 8 participants, so sign up early!*



*For more information or to sign up contact:*

*Kristin Olson, CTRS, RYT*

*320-252-1670 x6031*

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# Holiday Safety



The holidays are a time for happiness and celebration, but they can also be a time of danger. Don't let the rush and excitement of the holiday season keep you from practicing safety first.

## **Shopping**

- Stay alert. Don't rush. Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Shop during daylight hours whenever possible. If shopping at night, park in well-lit areas.
- Do not shop alone; you are safer in a group.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash. Use checks or credit, charge, or debit cards instead.
- Beware of strangers approaching you for any reason.

## **ATMs**

- Avoid using ATMs after dark.
- If anything makes you uncomfortable or anyone looks suspicious, leave immediately.
- Do not waste time - have your ATM card ready and make your transaction quickly.
- When finished, be sure you collect your card and your receipt, and then leave immediately.
- Do not count or display large amounts of cash in public.

*(cont. next page)*



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### Driving

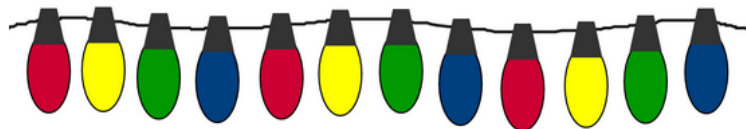
- Wear your seat belt at all times, even for short distances - and make sure your passengers do too!
- Allow yourself plenty of time to get to and from your destination(s) as holiday traffic can be unpredictable.
- Check the weather before heading out. Wintry weather can make driving hazardous.
- Always appoint a designated driver when attending seasonal gatherings.
- Do not use the cell phone, text or read while driving and watch out for those who do!

### Home Security

- Keep your doors and windows locked at all times.
- Keep your garage door shut even when you are at home.
- Do not open your door to strangers. Require that proper identification be shown.

### Decorations

- When purchasing a live tree, needles should be hard to pull from branches and not break when bent between your fingers. The bottom should be sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles. Keep away from heat sources such as fireplaces, vents, and radiators and monitor water levels daily.
- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the "Fire Resistant" label.
- Use UL or ETL/ITSNA safety tested lights only. Do not use ANY electric lights on a metallic tree. Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Do not use damaged sets.
- Never use indoor lights outdoors. Only use lights that are certified for outdoor use and only plug them into a ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protected receptacle or a portable GFCI.
- Do not leave candles unattended or within the reach of children or pets. Also, avoid sharp, weighted, or breakable decorations, and trimmings that resemble candy or food.



Happy  
Holidays!

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### ***Veteran Spotlight:***

## **Hall of Fame Induction For Local Veteran**

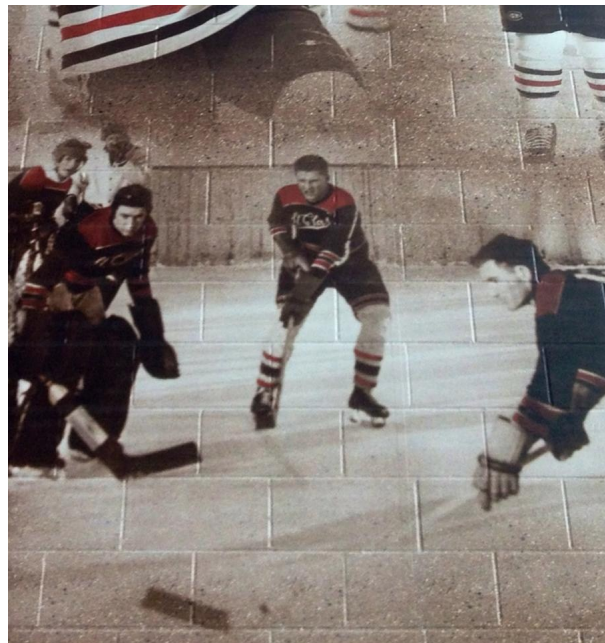
Congratulations to local Veteran Bill Frantti, who was recently inducted into the Minnesota State High School Coaches Association (MSHSCA). Mr. Frantti earned the title “Godfather of Central Minnesota Hockey” with a career spanning over 50 years.

Criteria for selection as a Hall of Fame Coach includes:

1. Individuals selected as nominees must have shown a deep sense of responsibility in the manner in which they conducted themselves as coaches and demonstrated a dedication to the highest ideals of competitive interscholastic athletics.
2. Of equal importance is the manner in which they conducted their programs, that they may be most beneficial to their players, their schools, and their communities, always reflecting a positive image of interscholastic athletics and/or coaches.
3. They shall have demonstrated the characteristics of leadership, the ability to motivate and inspire and to guide and counsel young athletes.

Mr. Frantti was a Regimental 1st Sergeant in the Army 35th Infantry, 25th Division in Japan from 1946-1948. He was an Administrative Non-Commissioned Officer working with payroll and furlough time. He was Honorably Discharged in June 1948 as a Sergeant 3rd Class.

To read more about Mr. Frantti’s accomplishments, go to <http://mshsca.epubs.forumprinting.com/publication/?i=226038>



Mural depicting Bill Frantti at Herb Brooks National Hockey Center at St. Cloud State University

*Know an interesting story about a Veteran making contributions to his or her community? Let us know! We’d love to share them with others. Send to [vhastcnewbits@va.gov](mailto:vhastcnewbits@va.gov) or contact Kris at 320-255-6353.*

# THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKEOUT

## QUIT FOR HEALTH AND BREATHE EASIER



### OVERVIEW

Each year VA observes the Great American Smokeout on the third Thursday of November. Every year, thousands of Veterans participate by quitting smoking. VA encourages Veterans like you to make a quit plan, for your health, your family, and your life.

### BENEFITS OF QUITTING

The benefits of quitting smoking are immediate and last a lifetime:

- **20 minutes after quitting**, your blood pressure drops and the circulation in your hands and feet improves.
- **12 hours after quitting**, the carbon monoxide level in your blood returns to normal.
- **2 days after quitting**, your taste and smell senses improve.
- **2 weeks to 3 months after quitting**, your heart attack risk drops and your lung function improves.
- **1 to 9 months after quitting**, your coughing and shortness of breath decrease.
- **1 year after quitting**, your added risk of heart disease is half that of a smoker's.
- **5 to 15 years after quitting**, your risk of stroke is now equal to a non-smoker's.
- **10 years after quitting**, if you are an average smoker (one pack a day) your lung cancer death rate drops by almost half. Risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas decreases.
- **15 years after quitting**, your added risk of heart disease is the same as a non-smoker's.

### START YOUR JOURNEY TO QUIT

No matter how long you have been smoking, it is never too late to quit! Even if you have tried to quit unsuccessfully before, keep trying. Three million Americans successfully quit smoking every year, and you can be one of them. **START** your journey today:

- **Set** a quit date.
- **Tell** your family and friends so they can offer support and help you remember why quitting is so important.
- **Anticipate** and plan for challenges.
- **Remove** all cigarettes, lighters, and ashtrays from your home, car, and workspace.
- **Talk** to your doctor, he/she can counsel you and prescribe medication that can help. Together smoking cessation medicines and counseling offer you the best chance to quit, and stay quit. Click here, to find a VA facility near you or call toll-free 1-877-222-8387.

VA has other resources available to help:

- Sign up today for **SmokefreeVET**, a free text messaging service that offers on-to-go support when you need it most. Visit <http://smokefree.gov/vet> or text the word VET to 47848.
- Call the VA's Tobacco Quitline—**1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838)** to speak with a smoking cessation counselor. Counselors will help you develop a quit plan and strategies to avoid relapsing and provide individualized counseling.

Visit [www.publichealth.va.gov/smoking/](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/smoking/) for tips and resources to help you quit.

### CONNECT WITH US:



SUBSCRIBE TO RECEIVE EMAIL UPDATES AT  
[WWW.PUBLICHEALTH.VA.GOV](http://WWW.PUBLICHEALTH.VA.GOV)



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[TWITTER.COM/VETERANSHEALTH](https://twitter.com/veteranshealth)

[WWW.PUBLICHEALTH.VA.GOV/SMOKING](http://WWW.PUBLICHEALTH.VA.GOV/SMOKING)

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Public Health

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## Tele - ICU Has Arrived at the St. Cloud VA

The St. Cloud VA Health Care System, in collaboration with the Minneapolis VA, has developed a partnership to provide critical care management to our Veterans in the Respiratory Dependent Unit.

This partnership includes management by intensivist (doctors who specialize in critical care medicine) physicians and specialty trained nursing staff who work from a centralized monitoring center in Minneapolis. The St. Cloud VAHCS staff is able to connect via a live video feed immediately to these specialty staff at the Minneapolis VA with the push of a button at the Veteran's bedside.

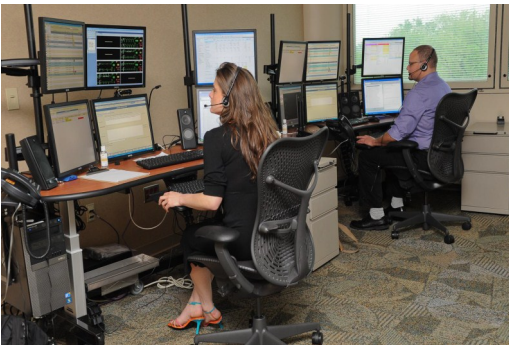


A “second set of eyes” can now monitor Veterans at the St. Cloud location.

“Our job is to collaborate with the bedside team,” said Dr. Robert Bonello, medical director of the program at the Minneapolis VA. “This high-tech service greatly improves Veterans’ access to highly skilled intensivists by placing them in the patients’ rooms via audio and visual telecommunications software. We aren’t replacing bedside care. Instead, we provide an added layer of support managing high risk patient population.”

The Tele-ICU is located in a quiet and restricted area on the fourth floor of the Minneapolis VA and is equipped with a bank of monitoring screens that show vital signs (heart rate and blood pressure) and lab values. There is a live two-way audio-video feed. The video resolution is so high, intensivists can see a patient’s pupils constrict in response to light.

At St. Cloud, the rooms of the Respiratory Dependent Unit are outfitted with a two-way video camera that is mounted above each Veteran’s bed to allow the specialist to perform visual assessments. This also allows staff an opportunity to get input from a medical physician 24 hours a day when a Veteran’s health may be deteriorating and medical support is needed.



*Example of a central monitoring center*

Currently there are two rooms set up with the Tele-ICU with plans to expand to 15 rooms in the near future.



St. Cloud VA Health Care System has been named a

## **Leader in LGBT Healthcare Equality**

for the second year in a row. The Healthcare Equality Index is an annual survey by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) that healthcare organizations can participate in to affirm that they comply with Joint Commission and Centers for

Medicare and Medicaid requirements. Leaders in Healthcare Equality meet each of the “Core Four” criteria – patient non-discrimination policies, visitation policies, employment non-discrimination policies, and training in LGBT patient-centered care. St. Cloud VAHCS is the **only facility in St. Cloud** to be awarded HEI Leader status and one of a select group of 426 healthcare facilities nationwide to be named Leaders in LGBT Healthcare Equality.

“Leaders in LGBT Healthcare Equality change the lives of LGBT patients and their families for the better each and every day,” said Chad Griffin, HRC president. “LGBT people should be treated equally in all aspects of our lives, and HRC celebrates the St. Cloud VAHCS for their tireless work to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all patients.”

The Healthcare Equality Index offers healthcare facilities unique and powerful resources designed to help provide equal care to a long-overlooked group of patients, as well as assistance in complying with new regulatory requirements and access to high-quality staff training.

For more information about the Healthcare Equality Index 2014, or to download a free copy of the report, visit [www.hrc.org/hej](http://www.hrc.org/hej).

*As a VA patient, you will be treated with dignity, compassion, and respect as an individual. Consistent with Federal law, VA policy, and accreditation standards of The Joint Commission, you will not be subject to discrimination for any reason, including for reasons of age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, physical or mental disability, socioeconomic status, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression.*



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## town hall meeting

On September 8, the St. Cloud VA conducted two town hall meetings to provide the Veterans we serve an opportunity to hear from and address senior leadership.

The first session, at 1:30 p.m., was held for Veteran residents of the Community Living Center. The second session, at 5 p.m., was for all enrolled Veterans and families.

Approximately 30 residents of the CLC attended the CLC Town Hall, and approximately 40 Veterans attended the Town Hall.

At both events, the Director presented an overview of services and issues, followed by an hour of questions and answers. A combination of written questions and questions from the floor were presented. Subject matter experts provided responses to questions, when appropriate.

Veterans at the CLC Town Hall presented a number of concerns and suggestions, including the desire for enhanced wheelchair accessibility throughout the facility, improved menu choices and condiments during meals, improved facilities to accommodate visitors, more parking, and expansion of the therapy animal program.

A group of Veterans at the Town Hall presented concerns regarding the management of a Vietnam Veteran Support Group. Many of the group members in attendance felt the transition to peer-led support groups was driven by financial concerns.

Several issues regarding women Veterans health care issues were raised, including orthotics and CPAP devices not being sized for women, questions over plans to improve the Women's Clinic space, and a concern about surgical referrals for women Veterans lacking necessary and appropriate care coordination. Services for Military Sexual Trauma (MST) only diagnoses were cited as insufficient.

One Veteran's spouse voiced concern over the use of Non VA care, stating that the quality of care was better in VA facilities than in private settings. Additionally, the number of Veteran employees was cited as a concern as it was felt that there are an inadequate number of VA employees who are Veterans. A congressional staff member inquired as to what the facility is doing to protect whistleblowers. Finally, a number of Veterans were complimentary of the care they received.

*(cont. next page)*

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Several questions submitted were about a Veteran's specific medical situation, which required personal follow-up. Contact was initiated with each of these Veterans or family members immediately following the meeting.

The Vietnam Veterans Support Group was invited to a follow-up meeting with the Director on Sept. 26 to further discuss their concerns.

The Minutes of both meetings are available on the home page of the St. Cloud VA website at [www.stcloud.va.gov](http://www.stcloud.va.gov) through November 15. Afterwards, the Minutes will be available on the News & Events tab of the website. Veterans without access to a computer may call 320-255-6353 to obtain a copy of the Minutes.

***BOTTOM LINE: Recommendations from Veterans***

- enhance wheelchair accessibility throughout the facility;*
- improve menu choices and condiments during meals;*
- improve CLC facilities to accommodate visitors;*
- add more parking;*
- expand the CLC therapy animal program;*
- reinstatement of a licensed facilitator for the Vietnam Veterans Support Group*



**The next St. Cloud VA Town Hall Meeting is  
scheduled for December 10, 2014, at 5 p.m., at  
Buffalo American Legion Post #270, 304 10th Ave S,  
Buffalo MN.**



## 2014 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

The Minnesota Veterans Choir, comprised of residential Veterans from the St. Cloud VA, received first place honors in the Senior Vocal Group category during the 2014 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

Their winning entry was "You Are My Sunshine." This group also placed first in 2013.

Second place in the Special Recognition Group went to the RDU Band, another group from the St. Cloud VA, for their rendition of "Blue Suede Shoes."

This year's national festival had over 3,200 entries in dance, creative writing, drama, music, and art from 129 VA facilities.

Congratulations to the Veterans in these two groups, and to all who participated in the festival.

Videos of the winning performances can be viewed on our Facebook page (posted October 21) : <https://www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS?ref=hl>

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## Dental Clinic Ribbon Cutting

On October 27, the St. Cloud VA held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the newly expanded Dental Clinic. We were honored that Senator Amy Klobuchar and Congresswoman Michele Bachmann were on-hand to help open the expanded clinic to Veterans.

The expanded Dental Clinic meets a critical need for Central Minnesota Veterans requiring dental care. The new clinic features seven new dental chairs, bringing our total number of dental chairs to 18. The expansion effort also added a new oral surgery room, a private operatory space for special needs Veterans, a dental office, and a new reception/waiting area.

The construction project added a 3,600 square foot, two story addition to Bldg. 3 (originally built in 1923), and remodeled approximately 2,000 square feet of existing space. The project also added an elevator to the building and expanded the HVAC system serving the building.



Associate Director Cheryl Thieschafer, VISN 23 Director Jan Murphy, Nurse Executive Meri Hauge, U.S. Congresswoman Michele Bachmann, U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar, Chief of Dentistry Dr. Jeffrey Uhl, Director Barry Bahl and Chief of Staff Dr. Susan Markstrom prepare to cut the ribbon as the newly expanded Dental Clinic at the St. Cloud VA is opened on October 27, 2014.

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## From the *Baltimore Sun*: **VA is critical to medicine and vets**

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/oped/bs-ed-va-secretary-20141023-story.html#>

By Robert A. McDonald, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, October 23, 2014

During preparation for my confirmation as secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA), I was repeatedly asked, "Why doesn't VA just hand out vouchers allowing veterans to get care wherever they want?" For a department recovering from serious issues involving health care access and scheduling of appointments, that was a legitimate question.

After nine weeks at VA, travel to 31 VA facilities in 15 cities, discussions with hundreds of veterans and VA clinicians, meetings with 75 Members of Congress, two hearings before the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs committees and dozens of meetings with Veterans Service Organizations and other stakeholders, I can answer that question.

Veterans need VA, and many more Americans benefit from VA.

Almost 9 million veterans are enrolled to receive health care from VA — a unique, fully-integrated health care system, the largest in the nation. The VA stands atop a critical triad of support — three pillars that enable holistic health care for our patients: research, leading to advances in medical care; training that's essential to build and maintain proficiency of care; and delivery of clinical care to help those in need.

VA's accomplishments on all three pillars and contributions to the practice of medicine are as broad, historically significant and profound as they are generally unrecognized.

VA is affiliated with over 1,800 educational institutions providing powerful teaching and research opportunities. And our research initiatives, outcomes and honors are tremendous. Few understand that VA medical professionals:

- Pioneered and developed modern electronic medical records;
- Developed the implantable cardiac pacemaker;
- Conducted the first successful liver transplants;
- Created the nicotine patch to help smokers quit;
- Crafted artificial limbs that move naturally when stimulated by electrical brain impulses;
- Demonstrated that patients with total paralysis could control robotic arms using only their thoughts — a revolutionary system called "Braingate";
- Identified genetic risk factors for schizophrenia, Alzheimer's and Werner's syndrome, among others; *(cont. next page)*



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—Applied bar-code software for administering medications to patients — the initiative of a VA nurse;

—Proved that one aspirin a day reduced by half the rate of death and nonfatal heart attacks in patients with unstable angina;

—Received three Nobel Prizes in medicine or physiology; seven prestigious Lasker Awards, presented to people who make major contributions to medical science or public service on behalf of medicine; and two of the eight 2014 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America medals.

No single institution trains more doctors or nurses than VA. More than 70 percent of all U.S. doctors have received training at VA. Each year, VA trains, educates and provides practical experience for 62,000 medical students and residents, 23,000 nurses and 33,000 trainees in other health fields — people who go on to provide health care not just to veterans but to most Americans.

The 278,000 employees of the Veterans Health Administration work in a system spanning all 50 states and beyond, providing — from Maine to Manila — a high volume of quality, clinical care. Our 150 flagship VA Medical Centers are connected to 819 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, 300 Vet Centers providing readjustment counseling, 135 Community Living Centers, 104 Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Centers, and to mobile medical clinics, mobile Vet Centers and telehealth programs providing care to the most remote veterans.

That network of facilities allows VA to deliver care to veterans from the greatest generation of World War II to the latest generation from Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2013, VA provided over 90 million episodes of care; that's an average of over 240,000 each day. And since 2004, the American Customer Satisfaction Index survey has consistently shown that veterans receiving inpatient and outpatient care from VA hospitals and clinics give a higher customer satisfaction score, on average, than patients at private sector hospitals.

Finally, VA is uniquely positioned to contribute to the care of veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI), prosthetics, PTSD and other mental health conditions, and the treatment of chronic diseases such as diabetes and hepatitis. The work we do in these areas, as well as many others, produces results and life changing improvements in care for veterans — and for all Americans and people around the world who suffer from these conditions.

Fixing access to VA care is important; we have a plan to do that and are dedicated to implementing it. That process will take time — but it must be done, and we will be successful. Those who fully understand the value of the department in research, training, and clinical care understand that veterans and all Americans need and deserve their VA to continue providing exceptional care to those we serve.

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# Facts

## The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014

Please bookmark <http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/> in your web browser to stay abreast of the announcements about the new law.

On August 7, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146) (“Choice Act”). Technical revisions to the Choice Act were made on September 26, 2014, when the President signed into law the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-175). The Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) goal continues to be to provide timely, high-quality health care for Veterans.

Section 101 of the Choice Act requires VA to establish a program (“the Veterans Choice Program”) to improve Veterans’ access to health care through the provision of hospital care and medical services by eligible providers outside of the VA system (non-VA care). Sections 102 and 103 of the Choice Act are also discussed below.

### **Background**

In order to improve VA’s ability to deliver high-quality health care to Veterans, section 101 of the Choice Act requires VA to expand the availability of hospital care and medical services for eligible Veterans through agreements with eligible non-VA entities and providers. This is referred to as the Veterans Choice Program. Veterans who meet certain eligibility requirements will be able to elect to receive care from eligible non-VA entities and providers through the Program. VA must enter into agreements with eligible non-VA health care entities and providers for them to participate in the Program. Prior to the Choice Act being passed, VA had mechanisms in place to purchase non-VA care. Those mechanisms are still available to VA, and the Choice Act will enhance VA’s non-VA care options.

### **Veterans Choice Fund and Veterans Choice Program**

The Choice Act includes a \$10 billion Veterans Choice Fund from which VA must pay for non-VA care furnished as part of the Veterans Choice Program. VA will provide a Veterans Choice Card to all Veterans who were enrolled in the VA health care system as of August 1, 2014, and to recently discharged combat Veterans. Eligibility criteria are discussed in greater detail below.

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## **Eligibility**

Initially, a Veteran must be enrolled in VA health care on or before August 1, 2014, or be eligible to enroll as a recently discharged combat Veteran within 5 years of separation. Additionally, a Veteran must also meet at least one of the following criteria.

- a) The Veteran attempts to schedule an appointment with VA for hospital care or medical services but is unable to schedule an appointment within 30 days of the Veterans preferred date, or the clinically appropriate date.
- b) The Veteran lives more than 40 miles from the VA facility that is nearest to the Veteran's residence, including a community-based outpatient clinic.
- c) The Veteran lives in a state without a medical facility that provides hospital care, emergency services and surgical care rated by the Secretary as having a surgical complexity of standard, and the Veteran resides more than 20 miles from such facility.
- d) The Veteran lives 40 miles or less from a VA health care facility but needs to travel by air, boat, or ferry, or faces an unusual or excessive burden on travel due to geographical challenges.

## **Cost Sharing**

If an eligible Veteran has another health-care plan, VA will be secondarily responsible for costs associated with non-service connected care and services furnished to eligible Veterans through the Veterans Choice Program.

## **Medical Records**

When a Veteran receives care from an eligible non-VA health care entity or provider, the entity or provider must submit to VA a copy of any medical record information related to the care and services provided. This information will be included in the Veteran's medical record maintained by the Department.

## **Indian Health Service and Native Hawaiian Health Care Systems**

VA will work with the Indian Health Service (IHS) to ensure that certain medical facilities operated by an Indian tribe or tribal organization are aware of the opportunity to negotiate reimbursement agreements with VA. This is in accordance with section 102 of the Choice Act. VA will enter into contracts or agreements with certain Native Hawaiian Health Care Systems (NHHCS) for reimbursement of direct care services provided to eligible Veterans. This is in accordance with section 103 of the Choice Act.

## **Questions**

### **Q: How long will it take to implement the Veterans Choice Program?**

**A:** In order to ensure Veterans receive high-quality and timely health care, VA is working to implement the Veterans Choice Act, including the Veterans Choice Program, as quickly as possible.

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**Q: How will Veterans get their Veterans Choice Card?**

**A:** VA will mail the Veterans Choice Card to Veterans enrolled in VA health care as of August 1, 2014, and to recently discharged combat Veterans who enroll within the 5 year window of eligibility. Not all Veterans who receive the Card will be able to participate in the Veterans Choice Program right away. Only eligible Veterans may participate.

**Q: Is the criteria 40 miles or 30 days?**

**A:** Eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program is based on the Veteran's place of residence or the inability to schedule an appointment within the "wait-time goals" of VHA. A Veteran could be eligible under one or both of these criteria. Please note that Veterans who are eligible based on their place of residence may elect non-VA care for any service that is clinically necessary. Veterans who are eligible based on "wait-time" may select non-VA care only for an appointment for the service that cannot be scheduled within the "wait-time goals" of VHA.

**Q: Does the 40 mile rule refer to whether the specialty need (for example, Orthopedic Surgery) is available within 40 miles, or 40 miles from any VA facility, whether or not the specialty, in this example Orthopedics, is available there?**

**A:** The law indicates that what matters is the distance from the Veteran's residence to *any* VA medical facility, even if that facility cannot provide the care that the Veteran requires. VA is developing an interactive tool that will be available on va.gov for Veterans to determine their potential eligibility for VA Choice based on their place of residence. Veterans will enter their address information into the tool. The tool will calculate their distance to the nearest site of VA care and return that mileage and information on their eligibility for VA Choice program.

**Q: What are the criteria used to determine the 40 mile radius? Is it similar to the Dashboard used to calculate mileage reimbursement?**

**A:** VA will calculate distance between a Veteran's residence and the nearest VA medical facility using a straight-line distance, rather than the driving distance. VA is developing an interactive tool that will be available on va.gov for Veterans to determine their potential eligibility for VA Choice based on their place of residence. Veterans will enter their address information into the tool. The tool will calculate their distance to the nearest site of VA care and return that mileage and information on their eligibility for VA Choice program

**Q. How will eligibility be determined for those Veterans who receive a "Veterans Choice Card," and are there limitations on what service they qualify for outside of the VA system?**

**A:** Once a Veteran receives a Veterans Choice Card, they will be eligible to use the Program if they meet the specific eligibility criteria discussed above. Veterans who are eligible based upon their place of residence will be eligible to use the Choice Program for services in the medical benefits package that are clinically necessary. Veterans who are eligible because of the wait-time criterion will only be able to receive a non-VA appointment for the episode of care related to the service that cannot be scheduled within the "wait-time goals" of the Veterans Health Administration.

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# *A Recipe for Health* **BBQ Chicken Pizza**

## *Ingredients*

1 (2.5 oz.) Greek pita flatbread  
1 T. barbecue sauce  
2 oz. cooked chicken breast

¼ c. reduced-fat cheddar cheese  
6 jalapeno slices

## *Directions*

Preheat oven to 400°. Evenly spread barbeque sauce on one side of flatbread. Top with chicken breast, then cheese. Place jalapeno slices on top of cheese layer. Bake 10-12 minutes or until cheese is melted and edges are crispy.

## *Nutritional Information*

345 calories, 10g fat, 42g carbohydrates, 25.5 protein.





## *Take care of your buddy!*

Help a fellow Veteran enroll  
for VA healthcare.

Contact your County Veteran  
Service Officer, call the St.  
Cloud VA at 320-255-6340,  
or apply online at

[www.1010ez.med.va.gov](http://www.1010ez.med.va.gov)

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